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ABSTRACT

This manual outlines a process for building the good working relationships needed to develop inclusive school environments. It outlines five steps involved in achieving inclusion of children with special needs in ordinary classrooms: (1) clarify the family's intention to include their child in the neighborhood school and get to know the child's dreams and gifts; (2) enlist the principal's help in including the student; (3) enroll the classroom teacher in including the student; (4) involve the student's classmates in welcoming the student to the class; and (5) gather the people involved (students, family members, teachers, and administrators) to develop a process for adaptation of curriculum and class routine, through the MAPS (making action plans) technique. The approach involves designating someone to act as a consultant to facilitate integration; this consultant can work for the school or can begin as an ally of the family and build a relationship with school personnel as the process continues. (JDD)

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action for inclusion

How To Improve Schools By Welcoming Children With Special Needs Into Regular Classrooms

O'Brien & Forest
with
Snow, Pearpoint & Hasbury

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John O'Brien & Marsha Forest

with

Judith Snow, Jack Pearpoint & David Hasbury

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About the authors...

John O'Brien

John is a master problem solver and story teller. He travels the globe helping individuals and organizations make the change to fully inclusive community. His vast experience and his ability to listen, then suggest positive plans of action make him one of the most sought after consultants/advisors in North America.

Marsha Forest

Marsha is the founder and director of the Centre for Integrated Education and Community at Frontier College. She speaks and writes on the issue of "all kids belong together". As a consultant to school systems in Canada and the United States, Marsha has first hand experience and proof that quality education for all can work. Marsha is also the director of the McGill Summer Institute, a leadership training program held each summer in Montreal.

Judith Snow

Judith's life is a testimony to her courage and determination to live in the community on her own terms. Judith has challenged the system and is now helping families, schools, and organizations to build circles of support and friendship around vulnerable and oppressed people. Judith teaches courses, writes insightfully and is a popular consultant.

Jack Pearpoint

After graduating from the University of Saskatchewan in 1968, Jack Pearpoint left Canada for 5 years with CUSO in West Africa. He became President of Frontier College, Canada's oldest adult education organization in 1975. For 16 years Jack was a leader in the international literacy movement. Today, Jack is a lecturer, writer and administrator in building inclusive communities where "all belong". Jack is now the Executive Director of the Centre for Integrated Education and Community and is devoted to building a more just and democratic society.

David Hasbury

David, once a teacher in segregated settings himself, now helps other teachers, parents, and organizations to liberate themselves from the limits of the past and move into the future. He is a consultant to school boards and teaches courses in the role of the facilitator in building MAPS and circles.

We Believe

Good schools get better when they include all the children in the school's neighborhood. Good teachers grow stronger when they involve each child as a member of a class of active learners by offering each the individualized challenges and supports necessary for learning. Students develop more fully when they welcome people with different gifts and abilities into their lives and when all students feel secure that they will receive individualized help when they need it. Families get stronger when they join teachers and students to create classrooms that work for everyone.

Inclusion is fundamental to learning about the world as it really is. Until each child belongs, efforts to achieve educational excellence build on sand. Daily relationships which disclose the myriad capacities and gifts of all people lay at the foundation of education. Inclusive schools build and nurture these essential relationships.

But some students are unwelcome in their neighborhood school or placed in isolated classrooms away from other students because they have special needs. The administrators and teachers who send them away explain their exclusion and segregation as the only effective way to meet their special needs. Repeated and elaborated without challenge, this explanation distorts everyone's sense of what a school can be and what students and teachers can do. The idea of necessary exclusion is rooted in misunderstanding and fear of the child with special needs; it cannot bear good fruit.

The pioneering families, students, teachers, principals, and school boards with whom we work disprove the common assumption that children with special needs must be isolated. Their common sense belief in themselves and the results of their sustained hard work renders obsolete the whole structure of expectations, job descriptions, and funding mechanisms that arise from mistaken beliefs in exclusion.

Inclusion is the right thing to do. It challenges everyone concerned with education to change their ideas about the place of children with special needs by changing routine practice and welcoming all children into each classroom. Like any change resulting in greater social justice, action for inclusion demands new learning and hard work. The practical lessons in this manual - distilled from five years work in good, ordinary classrooms - outline these demands and share what we have learned so far about how to meet them.

A Note About Words

in•te•grate (in-te-grayt) *v.* 1. to combine or form (a part or parts) into a whole. 2. to bring or come into equal membership of a community.

in•clude (in-klood) *v.* to have or regard or treat as part of a whole.

Many discussions of integration for students with special needs confuse us because people seem to mean so many different things by the words. We want to be clear about what we mean by each basic term.

Integration is our goal. The word comes from the Latin for making complete in the sense of renewing or restoring wholeness. We aim to develop complete classrooms, classrooms that continually renew and restore wholeness among children and teachers who represent the diversity of the real community they live in.

Inclusion of those who have been left outside is the first step in integration. The word derives from the Latin for shutting the door after someone has come into the house. Some people think that you can speak of integration without inclusion. This seems like nonsense to us. Integration begins only when each child belongs.

Students with Special Needs

Students with special needs challenge a teacher's ability to individualize instruction, support positive relationships among students, and collaborate with parents. Thus they challenge the principal's ability to lead positive change and support teachers and specialist staff as they expand their competence.

Do labels matter?

Many conditions contribute to a student's special need, and most of these conditions result in a variety of professionally attached labels. The labels aren't important to us. Carefully defined needs for assistance in being an active learner in a particular classroom do matter to us. Many conditions that result in professional labels are also the basis for prejudice, misunderstanding, and rejection. We know that prejudice exists and we are convinced that it can only be overcome by building shared relationships.

The only label we need is the child's name.
-Marsha Forest

Our experience makes us sensitive to the negative

Formal definitions are from *The Oxford Paperback Dictionary*. Derivations are from *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

effects of labeling. So much so that some of the members of the Centre for Integrated Education wanted to avoid using the term "students with special needs" in this manual. We agree with their reasons. All children deserve the regard and support we advocate; inclusive schooling can't happen if teachers reserve personalized assistance for any minority. And much current practice makes "special" a polite term for separate, unequal, and inferior. But we define the term here, and we will sometimes use it in the manual, to make it clear that we mean inclusion for all the students now assigned to special education and all the children whose parents are aware that their child needs extraordinary assistance in many situations. We also speak of "children who are excluded" to refer to the same children before they become students.

Does age or degree of disability matter?

Some people believe that inclusion depends on age. They may think, "Younger children are easier to welcome than older students." We don't find that age matters. We have worked with teachers who have successfully included students with their age peers at every grade level.

There is only one criterion for inclusion. Breathing, life itself.
-Marsha Forest

Some people believe that inclusion depends on label. They may think, "Mildly disabled students can be included; severely disabled students can't." We don't find that categorical labels matter. We have worked with teachers who have successfully included students with all types and degrees of disability.

Neighborhood school

Neighborhood school is shorthand because some schools gather their students from many neighborhoods. To locate a student's neighborhood school and proper grade level, imagine that the student with special needs had a twin with no special needs and ask, "Where would the twin go to school and what grade would the twin be in?"

Seeing is Believing

People who make important social changes have a firm belief in the change they want to make. The power and promise of inclusive schooling must be seen and felt to be believed. Best is to visit inclusive schools. But arranging that may take some time. *With a Little Help From My Friends**, a video that tells the story of a junior high school classroom, offers a glimpse of inclusive schooling. *With a Little Help From My Friends* illustrates action for inclusion.

If you have the video, watch it now.

Who to contact for video:

Inclusion Press
24 Thome Cres.
Toronto, Ontario M6H 2S5
Fax/Phone: (416) 658-5363

This video and other materials are also distributed by Expectations Unlimited, Box 655, Niwot, Colorado, 80544.

About This Manual

Everyone in an inclusive school plays an important part because everyone from the custodian to the librarian can offer a welcome and everyone from the school board member to the parent of a kindergartener can expect, assist and celebrate inclusion. Creating a good school proceeds as everyone realizes the importance of inclusion and contributes to making it happen. This manual outlines a process to build good working relationships.

Purpose

People who want to create a welcome for a child with special needs into an ordinary classroom in a neighborhood school will learn the necessary steps and some of the problems from practical advice based on our experience with each step.

Sequence

We know that each of the steps we describe is necessary, and we have arranged them in a logical sequence. We begin with a family's desire to see their child with special needs in the same classroom as others of their age because that is the most common starting place in our experience to date. The process you will experience might start at a different point — if, for example, you are a principal who wants to reach out and create an inclusive school. No matter where you start, every step we describe matters.

For clarity, the steps are listed as if you go from one to the next in order. But in reality, you will be working on more than one task at once and you will often find yourself doubling back to refine or re-do previous steps. Where you begin and what will turn out to take most of your energy depends on what happens as you work to change your situation. We encourage you to adapt and build on the process outlined here.

Not a cookbook

We offer an orderly process with advice, guidelines, and suggestions for each step. But this is not a complete procedure for instant inclusion. Being an effective facilitator of inclusion is like being a good teacher. You don't just add water and stir. You must combine your own skills and style in different ways with the particular circumstances of each child, each family, each teacher, and each principal. You must plan your approach to each situation. You must ask for reactions from others at each step, reflect on what works and what you need to improve, and modify your plans accordingly. You must join in learning with others who do similar work.

Point of view

action for inclusion gathers busy people who may not be accustomed to collaborating to do new things. It helps if someone assists by keeping track of the process, organizing and facilitating planning and problem solving meetings, clarifying intentions, supporting conflict resolution, and linking people to helpful people and ideas. The manual describes all of the necessary tasks from the point of view of a person who takes responsibility for organizing the whole process, but we hope that most of the people involved in action for inclusion will read through the whole manual.

Seeing the Whole Process

Purpose

action for inclusion develops the capacity of a teacher and a class to welcome a child who has been excluded and provide the kind of individualized support necessary for that child to be an active learner.

Steps

action for inclusion has five steps:

① Clarify the family's intention to include their child with special needs in the neighborhood school and get to know the child's dreams and gifts.

② Enlist the principal's help in including the student.

③ Enroll the classroom teacher in including the student.

④ Involve the student's classmates in welcoming the student to the class and getting to know their new class member. Bring in other people in the school and community who can support the effort.

⑤ Gather the people involved to develop a process for continuously adapting the curriculum and class routine so that the student becomes a member of the class and the student's gifts are developed.

Focus

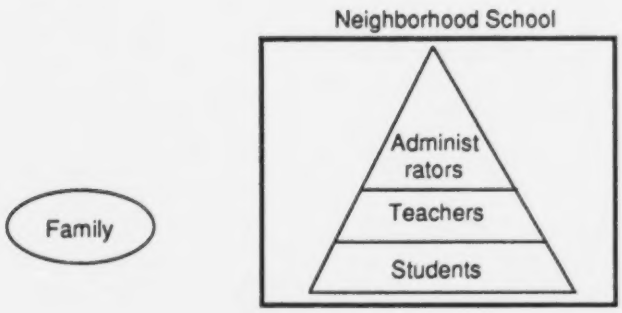
At every step, family, administrators, teachers, and students work together to...

- Build commitment to including the student
- Establish personal relationships and develop skills to enable effective problem solving in the classroom and in the school
- Better understand what it takes to support the student with special needs as an active learner and discover capacities to offer that support
- Learn more about the gifts and contributions of the student with special needs

Who is the student & what is needed now?
↓
Who can help?
↓
How?

Here is one way to visualize action for inclusion. At the beginning, things often look like this:

Resources Divided



Misunderstanding the educational needs and capacities of all students produces a situation which separates the family from the neighborhood school. The structure says their child belongs somewhere else because of special educational needs. Within the school are clear role definitions and a definite hierarchy. In the classroom, teachers initiate and evaluate; students respond. Specialized staff assess students who need more individualized help than the existing structure can deliver, label them, and take responsibility for their schooling. Students with substantial needs for individualized support go to different classrooms or even different school buildings. Students are grouped on the basis of their label.

Resources Aligned

action for inclusion calls for basic change in this segregationist structure. The integration consultant helps people make commitments to inclusion and build a circle in which everyone shares their resources.

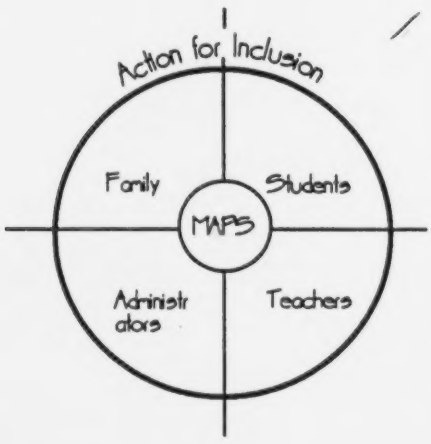
Family members and administrators and specialist staff assist regular class teachers and students to develop an inclusive classroom. Classroom teachers maintain responsibility for each child's learning and students assume responsibility for sharing class membership with every child. As problems in including a student with special needs arise, they are solved by the people most involved, who call on others to help as necessary. Some examples follow.

Seeing the whole process...

- A group of students deals with the person-to-person problems that come up around everyone belonging.
- A teacher works with the principal and special education resource person to solve an instructional problem.
- A teacher and a parent meet to agree on an approach to a student's problem behavior.

From time to time the people involved meet to share what they are learning, set direction, and renew their commitment to inclusion.

action for inclusion builds and maintains this circle from resources that are typically fragmented.



The Integration Consultant

Bringing people to good working relationships can be demanding, especially where segregation is entrenched. We recommend designating someone to act as a consultant to facilitate integration, although we do know of schools welcoming previously excluded students without one. Regardless of formal title, an integration consultant...

- Advocates strongly for inclusion

The integration consultant...

- Makes sure that all the necessary tasks get done well for each student
- Coaches family members, teachers, students, and administrators to identify their capacities and develop their skills
- Builds the circle by tending the necessary personal relationships among family members, teachers, students, and administrators
- Helps with problem solving
- Instructs faculty, staff, and students on integration and inclusion issues
- Assists administrators and faculty in developing school and district wide strategies for inclusion and further integration.
- Links local efforts with the rapidly developing field of inclusive schooling
- Sticks with people through time

In school systems with a policy commitment to inclusion, the integration consultant works for the school either as a staff member or on contract. In places where the school board has not yet decided that each child belongs, the integration consultant begins as an ally of the family and builds a relationship with school people as the process continues. Some integration consultants are professional educators, others are skilled people whose commitment to inclusion grew from experiences outside schools.

Building the School Community

Judith Snow & David Hasbury

The foundation of action for inclusion is community. The student who has been excluded can only be welcomed to the extent that people work together and rely upon each other for support and inspiration. Regardless of a person's role in the school community, whether student, teacher, principal, administrator or parent, all must recognize each other's significance and build relationships with each other. The uniqueness of one student often is the stimulus to bring these relationships together.

We can look at the school community in at least two different ways. From one point of view, the school is an institution with a purpose; to fill each new group of students with as much knowledge as possible. To fulfill this responsibility schools are organized as hierarchies with a chain of authority and responsibility. It is not easy to see how everyone can belong in this chain of control.

But schools are also places where people gather to become involved in freely chosen relationships. People find their own identity here and create their futures out of living everyday. These lived relationships can cut across classes, titles and other boundaries and divisions. These relationships are created out of the discovery of one person to another, of a sense of enjoyment in each others presence and contribution, a sense that " you help me get through my day ". There is no limit on who can belong in this network of meaning.

People who are seen as handicapped or unusual in other ways have a great deal to contribute to relationships and to the meaning of their own lives and the lives of others. Hierarchies tend to exclude these people because they have no obvious place. But by recognizing and calling upon the people in the school as members of the community, a place can be found for the person who was excluded. Indeed it will soon become obvious that the community has been missing this person.

Action for Inclusion is fundamentally a community building process. Those who are carrying it out will welcome people with many different roles together, including the excluded student and members of his/her family. In particular fellow classmates will be supported and encouraged to use their strengths and creativity in welcoming the new member. A process will be put in place which allows each person to struggle with the problems that inclusion evokes. In this way the entire community can be responsible for each member.

Clarify the Family's Intention

The Dream

The school must become a place of welcome for parents as well as children, assisting them in strengthening their abilities to dream, to work for inclusion despite many barriers, and to contribute to the making of an inclusive school.

-Judith Snow

Inclusion begins in the love of parent for child. Parental love forms the foundation for acceptance of the child's unique value as a person. Recognition of the child as a person first, beyond any labels or categories, grows into the desire for the child to be a valued participant in ordinary life. Parents are the first people able to name their child's gifts and the first people able to dream of inclusion for their child.

The desire to do the best for a child with a handicap frequently leads parents to search for diagnosis and treatment that will remove the handicap. Because many handicaps have no technical solution, this search can lead to confusion and frustration. It can overshadow a sense of the child's gifts. It can silence the desire for inclusion. But, beneath any confusion and frustration, parental love, knowledge, and desire remain at the heart of inclusion.

The Nightmare

Social expressions of prejudice threaten the dream of a child belonging to family, school, and community. Parents* recognize that negative beliefs about disability...

...overshadow the child's unique value in many people's eyes

...lead to and justify bad treatment of their child by others

...create social roles and expectations that make their child "one of them," fundamentally different somehow

* We know that some children have single parents and some children have more than two parents. We want to include anyone who feels parental love and exercises parental responsibility for a child with special needs in our discussion. We also want to recognize the importance of involving brothers and sisters in the action for inclusion process.

from non-disabled brothers and sisters.

Recognition that disability is socially devalued shapes a parental nightmare of their child as unacceptable, rejected, mistreated, defenseless. The nightmare gains ground as parents realize that negative beliefs about disability extend to them. They find themselves questioned and blamed for their child's disability as if it were a shameful thing—not only by outsiders but by friends, family, even by themselves.

Despite the nightmare, the dream survives. Because of the nightmare, the dream may be a closer kept secret than the nightmare. Sometimes we meet families in which husband and wife have not spoken their dream aloud to one another for fear that the other would find them foolish or hurtful.

Well meaning professionals can squelch a parent's dream of their child growing up as a full member of their community. They can shape a parent's sense that something must be done to remedy their child's disability into an understanding of their child as somehow incomplete and in constant need of professionally supervised special programming to fill up the incompleteness.

To the extent that parents seek to fend off the nightmare by searching for a cure, their child becomes a project for professional intervention. When cure lies beyond professional competence, as it does in many severely disabling conditions, the child becomes a failed project. Failed cure anguishes parent, child, and professional alike. The nightmare looms larger. Retreat into a special place where different, socially unacceptable people are kept safe seems the only secure defense.

But security can't come from the nightmare of unacceptability, rejection, mistreatment, and suffering. The answer to unacceptability and rejection can't be found by keeping people with disabilities away from other people. The answer is to create places that welcome all people regardless of disability and offer each person the chance to belong and contribute. In such places, people with disabili-

Clarify family intention...

ties find the security of membership and friendship. The answer to mistreatment and suffering can't be found by professionalizing every relationship. The answer is to create places in which each person is part of a circle of friends who support one another, challenge one another, and stand up for each other. The nightmare reminds us to be careful, to look out for problems and dangers, and to anticipate much hard work to overcome social prejudice. The answer lies in pursuing the dream into action.

Many parents find their dream confirmed and strengthened by the vision of an inclusive school classroom. The possibility that their child could find welcome and learn among others of the same age from the same neighborhood increases hope and brings a crisis.

A parent wants an inclusive classroom, but where is the power to achieve it? Only a handful of school boards make inclusion in regular classrooms a policy. In most places parents who want their child included will have to fight for what they want. Most administrators and teachers accept exclusion and isolation of children with special needs unquestioningly, as somehow natural and proper. Their first response to a request for inclusion may overwhelm the vision of inclusion. Some school people even celebrate segregating facilities and practices as the highest expression of professional practice and community caring. No wonder many parents go through a time of wishing they lived somewhere else, where someone else would make inclusion easy. This time passes when a parent realizes that the dream will only be reflected in reality if they work toward it.

Finding Allies

Some parents have pursued inclusion on their own and succeeded. Most discover that inclusion has no chance until they find allies. A growing number of parents ally with other parents and professionals concerned with better schooling in social change groups like the Integration Action Group. Through these groups, and through organizations that support integration, like the Centre for Integrated Education, more and more parents get help from someone who acts as their integration facilitator.*

* Don't get mixed up in titles. You may not think of yourself as an integration consultant. You may be a parent helping out another parent. You may be a staff person of an advocacy organization. If you ally with a family seeking inclusion for their child, we are writing to you as well as to the families, principals, and teachers you work with.

Clarify family intention...

Goal

This phase of action for inclusion aims to confirm the family's commitment to a clear vision of inclusion for their child with special needs.

Steps

The integration consultant begins to clarify the family's intention to include their child with special needs in their neighborhood school by getting to know the family. In this phase of work, the **integration consultant can help** parents...*

History

- ❑ Build their sense of the child's place in their family by **asking about the family's history** and what has happened with the child with special needs as well as other family members. Since many professionals ask about family history to begin a search for deficiency and some families will have been blamed as a result, the answer might sound rote or defensive. When parents find out that the integration facilitator has no interest in blaming the family, they will feel more free to discuss where they have come from.

Dream

- ❑ Confirm and share their dream for their child by **asking "What is your dream for your child?"**
  - Sometimes a parent will have a hard time finding words for their dream. Don't push or put words in people's mouths. Just acknowledge whatever comes. Remind the parent that the words for a dream grow clearer and stronger with re-telling and get permission to ask about the dream another time.

Be Careful!

* This is not a procedure to follow one, two, three. This is a description of the questions you need to discover a way to discuss. The way you do this — when, where, with which words, and in what order you raise issues — depends on the family situation, the family's relationship to you, and your own style. This doesn't have to be done in a formal meeting. Conversations over the kitchen table or while driving in the car may fit better. Think about and make a plan with each family you meet.

- Sometimes a parent finds it easier to tell the dream to a stranger —like the integration facilitator— than to their partner or their children. This could be because they fear that their dream will divide them from the rest of the family. Look with them for a way to make it safe to share their family dreams. Shared differences can be appreciated or negotiated; hidden differences drain energy.

- Sometimes a parent's bad experiences with people who are supposed to help lead to a sense of powerlessness and a decision to keep expectations very low in order to limit the pain of disappointment. A person who feels powerless may discourage other family members from expressing their dreams and desires for inclusion out of concern that the others will be hurt when the school denies them. Involvement with others in an action group may help a person revise the decision not to dream and act. Advice from someone the person respects and trusts for counsel may help too.

Nightmare

❑ Put their fears for the child into context by asking, **"What is your nightmare for your child? What is your greatest fear?"** Affirm the nightmare as an expression of love and concern for a child made especially vulnerable by social prejudice. Because of the nightmare, every child with disabilities needs the safety of belonging in the same places as non-disabled children and being known and befriended by some of them

- Putting the nightmare into words can be an emotional experience. Don't run from the feelings. Don't provide false reassurance. Listen carefully. Wait.

- Sometimes the words a person chooses to express the nightmare strike the listener as superficial. Don't push ("That doesn't sound like you really mean it.") or dismiss the words you are offered ("Why are you worried about a silly thing like that?") Listen respectfully.

Clarify family intention...

Interests, Likes & Gifts

- ❑ Affirm their appreciation of their child **by asking, "Who is your child? What are your child's interests, likes, and gifts? What words describe your child's uniqueness?"**

Needs

- ❑ Acknowledge their understanding of their child's special needs and their expertise by asking, **"What does your child need most? What kinds of support and assistance work best for your child?"**

  - Some parents answer this question only for the present; others answer about the future. Listen carefully and acknowledge what you have been told. Then shift their attention. For example, "You say she needs to be able to communicate better. That may take some time to improve How does she communicate with you now?"

  - Some parents answer in terms of specialized professional services. This mix up of professional means and people's needs can weaken a family's intention for inclusion. Acknowledge what you have been told and get permission to ask some further questions. For example, "If she gets the speech therapy she needs, what will she be able to do that she can't do now?" This clarification opens a door to discovering alternative ways to meet real needs.

A Vision of Inclusion

- ❑ Form a vision of inclusion for their family **by asking, "What do you see happening when your child is included in a regular class in the neighborhood school?"** Encourage parents to be imaginative and specific. What does inclusion sound like to them? What does it smell like? What good things happen?

Information & Connections

- ❑ Make their vision of an inclusive classroom more vivid and more realistic **by finding out what information they want and sharing what is happening in other places.** Arrange visits, phone calls and correspondence with parents who are a bit farther along the

Clarify family intention...

path to integration. Encourage membership in action groups. Promote attendance at talks or conferences. Provide video tapes, cassettes, and written information.

Risks & Costs

❑ Test the family's intention **by asking "What are your fears about inclusion?** What are the risks in seeking inclusion for your child? What problems could it create? What might you have to give up? What might it cost?" and "What benefits do you anticipate? How long do you think it will be before you begin to feel the benefits?"

- If this seems like discouraging a family from seeking inclusion, remember that the integration facilitator aims to help families get their children into regular classrooms, not necessarily to sell inclusion as an easy idea. In most places, families will have to work very hard for what they want. This discussion anticipates some of the real difficulties ahead.

- Keep track of fears, risks, and costs matter of factly. Then ask, "How can this list strengthen our plan? Which of these things can we do something about? How can we decrease the chances of some of these things happening? What do we need in order to be ready for things we can't prevent?

- Parents may have to be ready to give up some amount of specialized therapy within school time. Special classrooms and segregated schools often build their whole schedule and staffing pattern to offer a few minutes a day or week of isolated therapy interventions. It's usually unreasonable to expect a regular class to reorganize itself around such activities.

- Parents may have to find new ways to deal with after school care, specialized transportation, and summer programming if the school district links these resources tightly to special education.

- Affirm that **it's all right to be scared.** Fears join visions to direct and energize problem solving if people can face them instead of running away or getting overwhelmed.

Clarify family intention...

Family Capacities

- ❑ Recognize their capacities for action **by asking, "What strengths and capacities does your family have to draw on** to make inclusion real for your child?" Consider: family relationships, friends, memberships, learning from facing and solving past problems, time, outside help, action groups, etc.

Confirm Commitment

- ❑ Confirm their intention to seek inclusion for their child **by asking, "Do you want to commit your family to your vision of inclusion for your child?** Are you willing to work hard to accomplish inclusion? **Why do you want inclusion for your family?"**

  - Some families have traditions for observing moments of commitment: a special meal, a bottle of wine, a group hug, a prayer of dedication. This is a good time to draw on the power of such traditions.

  - Encourage parents to tell their friends, extended family, and support people like clergy and family doctors what they have decided for their child and why and ask for their help and support. This attracts help, highlights potential problems, and provides good practice for answering a question that will be repeated dozens of times before they achieve inclusion. Remind them that not everyone will understand or agree.

Next Steps

- ❑ Encourage action by asking, **"What's the next step?"** and negotiating your agreement to help by asking **"What do you need from me to take the next step?"**

- ❑ Assist the family to **build support** for themselves. Help family members identify and enlist the help of people who can offer personal support and practical aid.

Think About

- As much as possible, include the child's own answers to the questions in family discussions.
- Some families leave brothers and sisters out of their discussions on inclusion. If they do, it's important to look for ways to involve them after their parents have made a decision to work for inclusion.
- The integration facilitator will want to spend time enough with the student with special needs and the parents to begin to get to know them and to earn their trust.
- The integration facilitator needs to remain clear with the family about what the consultant can and cannot deliver. Sometimes families assume that inclusion is something that the consultant does for the family. It is not. Inclusion is something the consultant can help the family do for itself if the neighborhood school principal and teachers will cooperate.
- The level of practical support available from family and friends or from formal family support programs makes a big difference for a family with a child who needs a lot of care. Learning about inclusion takes time. Working for inclusion takes time. Belonging to an action group takes time. It makes sense to think about neighborhood and formal family supports when discussing potential costs and resources.
- The more good experience the neighborhood school has with inclusion the lower the costs and demands on families. When school board policy supports inclusion, families don't need to commit themselves to a major social change effort. But they still play an irreplaceable role in the process of action for inclusion.

Taking direction from the child

Judith Snow & David Hasbury

The energy that fuels the inclusive community comes from the dream that the parents have for their child. But just as importantly, the direction that the work of building community must take is set by the excluded child and his or her dreams.

This may not seem obvious at first, but in fact this is not a complicated reality. Each of us dreams about the same things. We dream about having friends, being loved , doing interesting things, and having a sense of importance or that our life is not wasted. We hope to be healthy, to be secure, and to have privacy and intimacy in our lives.

At the same time each of us has a unique expression of each of these dreams. One person wants friends to go skiing with; another would rather play chess or rap about politics. One person likes long walks in the woods; another can relax in a crowd. To know that would really meet the requirements of someone's dream, we have to know their story and you have to be willing to spend the time to listen to their ideas. You also have to walk the road of life for awhile with them while they participate in all those daily activities which shape them toward one expression of their dream and away from others.

As someone gets near to having their dream satisfied and as they are involved in activities which help them grow in their understanding of their dream, she/he becomes more and more of a gift to the others surrounding her/him. In other words the person becomes an exciting skiing companion, a stimulating chess player, a relaxing person to stroll along with or whatever.

The inclusive community can only be built on a solid foundation if the dreams of the excluded child are heard, understood, and enacted in daily life. By doing this the child becomes a gift to the others just as they become a gift to him/her. Therefore it is imperative that the bridge builder or those who are building the community hear the child's dreams and his or her ideas on how the dream can best be fulfilled. Even when these ideas seem to be completely unrealistic, steps must be taken to move in the direction that the child sets. Even small steps will offer the child opportunities to experience the interaction of dream and reality. This in turn will shape the child's dream, his /her giftedness and the welcome that the community offers.

The knowledge and understanding of the child that comes from this enables the bridge builder, family, etc. to now speak about the child not as a handicapped individual, but rather as a person who has dreams, hopes for the future and a capacity to contribute to reaching them. Having a greater understanding of a person's capacities also allows the community to recognize how this individual might actually contribute to the nature and quality of the community.

Enlist the Neighborhood School Principal

The road to inclusion leads directly to the neighborhood school principal's office door.

The Principal's Role

Through the school board, the public holds the principal accountable for the well being and quality of schooling for everyone in the school building. Denial of permission by the principal makes inclusion impossible; permission defines the minimum for an inclusive classroom. When a principal actively leads a school in a focused effort to improve quality, things get better for teachers, students, and parents concerned with education. The principal's active support makes an inclusive school possible.

No principal suffers from a shortage of important things that need doing or a lack of demands for attention. That's the nature of the job. It's important to make your initial request in a way that doesn't waste the principal's time. You can't demand that the principal drop all other problems to take up a new issue. Especially when that issue seems to be the responsibility of special educators. But expect thoughtful consideration and timely action on your proposal for an inclusive classroom. The principal can't demand that you drop a just and reasonable request because the principal has chosen a tough job.

This step will develop everyone's negotiating and creative problem solving skills.

Goal

This phase of action for inclusion aims to get the neighborhood school principal to consent to the inclusion of the excluded student in a regular classroom, with necessary supports and to select good teachers* to include the student.

Steps

❑ **Do your homework**. Careful planning and rehearsal of the first approach to the principal pays off.

Gather Information

- Find out about the school, the principal, and the school system. Are there other inclusion efforts in the school or in the district? What has happened with them? What is the attitude of the school board toward inclusion? What efforts to improve quality involve the principal now and how can you link your request for inclusion to them? What is the principal's style of decision making?

- The integration consultant or the parents can find out a lot about the school and the district from neighbors who are active in school affairs or from friends or neighbors who are teachers or administrators. Be very careful not to go over the neighborhood school principal's head in finding out about the school.

Practice

- **Rehearse**. Few people feel comfortable about a trip to the principal's office with a request. Plan what you want to say and practice saying it. Think of the request from the principal's point of view. Identify the questions that will probably come to the principal's mind and decide how you want to answer them. Then rehearse, with the integration consultant or a friend playing the part of the principal. Go over the meeting until you feel comfortable with your nervousness.

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* The number of teachers a student has depends on the school. Some schools have art, music, and gym teachers for children in primary grades. Don't forget them. Older students usually have more complex schedules with more teachers.

Enlist the principal...

Ask

❑ **Ask clearly and simply for exactly what you want:** inclusion of this child with special needs in a regular classroom with other students of the same age.

- Don't water down your request because of fear of failure and don't ask for more than you want as a bargaining ploy.
- Describe the child with special needs positively and be clear about the sort of assistance the child would likely need. Explain the resources available to provide this assistance and underline the importance of the principal, teachers, and students working together.
- Make it clear why this change matters to you and your child and why it matters to the school.
- Invite the principal to meet your child.

Parent's Role

❑ The **parents make the request**. The parents, not the integration consultant, are the principal's constituents.

- Decide in each situation whether the integration consultant should be present at the initial meeting.

Consultant's Role

- If the integration consultant attends, be sure to clearly define the consultant's role as an assistant to the family who is prepared to assist the principal, teachers, and students to welcome the student with special needs. The principal needs to see the integration consultant as a potential ally for better education, not as an adversary.
- Be ready for questions about the integration consultant's role. Is the integration consultant expecting to be paid by the school for assistance? An integration consultant who needs to be paid right away by a school the consultant is approaching for the first time greatly complicates the situation.

Enlist the principal...

Principal's Responses

- ❑ **Expect a positive response,** though not necessarily right away. Some principals say yes with little negotiation. Most have questions. Most need time to think and consult with their staff and their supervisors. Don't expect the principal to be an enemy. Let the responses to this request tell you whether or not you have an adversary. Don't threaten.

- ❑ **Don't be surprised or offended if the principal refers you to special education.** Most principals, like most everyone else, assume that children with special needs belong in special settings. Explain why you are coming to the principal of the neighborhood school rather than going to special education. Offer some contacts and information about inclusive schools but don't bury the principal in papers or videos.

- ❑ **If the principal says no,** find out why and ask what it would take to change the decision. If the principal refuses further discussion, know your options for appeal and tell the principal what you will do to pursue your request further. Leave the door open for further discussion. Don't damage your chances for building a relationship by making threats or being insulting.

Select the Teacher

- ❑ **When the principal says yes,** identify the teachers who will include the student with special needs.

  - The student with special needs belongs with age peers.

  - The student with special needs belongs with good teachers, people in whom the principal has confidence.

  - In large schools where students have complex schedules, it usually makes sense to assign someone on the school staff responsibility for overseeing the student's whole day.

  - Define the contribution that special educators will

make. In some school districts, special educators work for a different part of the system than do neighborhood school staff. It may take some negotiation to involve them.

- Decide whether the student will need adult assistance in the classroom and make arrangements to provide a teaching assistant or personal assistant as necessary.

❑ Negotiate the way the integration facilitator will be involved with the principal, the teachers, and the students. Begin this discussion by reviewing what the school needs to make inclusion work.

Think About

Involve Special Educators

◆ Some special educators may see education for students with special needs as their property. In some places, regulations assign decisions about students with special needs to a special education team. If the student presently attends special classes, consider your approach to this potential problem carefully. Weigh the potential costs and benefits of alternatives as you look for the best way to deal with such teams. Asking their permission leaves too much in their hands; failing to notify them of the family's intention to change educational arrangements likely leads to bad feelings; notifying the team too early may lead to someone else approaching the principal first.

Work with Other Families

◆ If more than one family seeks inclusion in the same school it makes sense to coordinate efforts. Decide whether it will work better to meet the principal first as a group or one at a time. Consider the possibilities for joint action. Identify possible conflicts among families and think about how to deal with them.

Respect the Principal's Concerns

◆ Expect the principal to wonder about the politics of your request. Whether the principal asks explicitly or not, the principal will try to get as much information as possible about the politics of the inclusion issue:

"Who is behind this?" "Do they really want something other than what they are asking for?" "Is this just one exceptional case or will there be more requests to follow

Enlist the principal...

this one?" "What benefits are there in this for my school?" "Who opposes this and why?" "How strong will the opposition be?" "How could supporting this hurt my school?"

Don't put down the principal as playing politics. Politics means managing conflicting demands and competing goals with scarce resources; it's a big part of any effective leader's job. The quality of inclusion depends on the principal's skill at managing these questions. It may take the principal time to work out answers. You can help by continuing to raise and discuss the issue: ask for exactly what you want and keep what you want at the focus of discussions; solicit questions and objections; be truthful in response to questions; and, offer connections to resource people.

Remember Your Goals

- Your minimum goal is to get the principal to agree to permit the student to become part of a class. Your maximum is to build enthusiastic support for an inclusive school. Over time, your ability to develop a good working relationship, based on shared commitments, makes a big difference to how close you can move to the maximum. Consider the value of a good working relationship as you plan strategy: be assertive, not withdrawn or assaultive; don't make threats unless the principal forces you to; and never make a threat that you aren't prepared to follow through. If you win an appeal and the principal must consent, resist the urge to crow and resume action for inclusion matter of factly.

If the answer is no...

Re-commit & Learn from Defeat

- It's OK to be angry. It's OK to cry. And its good to have involved friends to share the feelings of defeat. Then the question is, "Does the family want to renew commitment to its vision of inclusion?" If they do, reflect on what you can learn from the loss. Then decide what to do next. Some options follow.

Enlist the principal...

- Look for another local school that might be receptive to classroom inclusion —perhaps a religious or private school— and approach the principal of that school
- Increase efforts to organize with other parents in the school district who want inclusion
- Strengthen links to the larger movement for inclusion for more support, new ideas, and the search for provincial or state strategies
- Work to raise local awareness of integration as an issue, maybe by holding public meetings with people from inclusive schools or by raising the issue in school board elections
- Take a break to recharge
- Work on increasing the child's integration into life outside of school
- Seek a legal remedy

Get Advice About Legal Action

◆ Inclusion is the right thing to do. But it isn't yet clear under which circumstances it is a legally enforceable right. If you are considering seeking a decision from a human rights tribunal or the courts, be sure to get information from other parents about what to expect and advice from lawyers who keep up with this rapidly changing area of the law.

Enroll the Teacher

Classroom teachers hold the keys to inclusion for an excluded student. Though they may not believe it until they experience inclusion for themselves, inclusion draws on the same capacities that make them good teachers of any child. All good teachers are able to...

Good Teachers Are Resources

... respond to individual differences among students by adapting curriculum and routines, which makes it possible for a student with special needs to learn in their classroom.

...involve all students in class work by using a variety of instructional methods, which makes it possible for a student with special needs to be an active learner.

...create a safe environment that encourages responsible, cooperative behavior among students which makes it possible for a student who has been excluded to be a member of the class

...collaborate and share tasks effectively with teaching assistants, which makes it possible for a student who needs some extra adult or student assistance to be involved rather than isolated by having an assistant

...make good use of resource people without giving up responsibility for their class, which makes it possible for all the students in the class to gain from the contributions special educators and therapists can make

...build networks with colleagues to renew their sense of purpose and provide mutual help in problem solving, which makes it possible for the student who challenges the teacher's ability to benefit from the experience of many good teachers

...increase the teacher's own repertoire of skills and abilities, which makes the student with special needs a stimulus to the teacher's own development.

Many of the good teachers we have met don't see themselves as able to teach children with special needs. Very few have thought about inclusion and concluded it is impossible. Usually, the possibility hasn't come up because no one has ever asked them to question what everybody knows about children with special needs. Their experience in most teacher training programs and most school systems reinforces the idea that exclusion and isolation are the natural thing to do. Everyday experience, and the successful appeals of advocates for special education resources, have taught them that children with special needs ...

Common Misunderstandings

... fall well outside the range of difference they are able to accommodate

...learn very little even with special teaching and learn nothing from usual instructional approaches

...require constant adult attention and thus must be in very small classes

...drain the teacher's energy and discourage and depress all but the most special kind of person

...demand so much special attention that they detract from more academically able student's learning before they are diagnosed and appropriately placed

...need highly specialized instructional and therapeutic procedures which are beyond the teacher's ability to learn without career change

...will be rejected, ridiculed, and exploited by non-disabled students, if they ever came in contact

...are best off with "their own kind" —by which people mean other children with special needs— because their self concept would be damaged by constant rejection and continuous failure to measure up

...already get a much more substantial share of educational resources than non-disabled students do.

With these ideas in the back of their minds, no wonder many good teachers find the request to include a student with special needs odd at first.

Remember, inclusion involves making a place for a particular student who has been excluded, not renovating the classroom to bring in a whole group of new students. Keep focus. As long as you observe the principle of natural proportions —which means not congregating all the students with special needs from several neighborhoods in one school— the low prevalence of severely disabling conditions makes it unlikely that any teacher will have to accommodate more than one or two students with special needs at a time. Working out how to include a particular child in this class, this year defines a different problem than preparing a teacher to deal with whole categories of students. It's more manageable to figure out how to include Chris, who has brown eyes and hair, than to feel confident as a teacher of "autistic children."

Goal

This phase of action for inclusion aims to get the classroom teacher's cooperation to include the new student for a month and to provide the teacher with the supports necessary to make that month successful.

Steps

Introductions

- ❑ Decide on the best way to describe the student with special needs to the teachers. Think about the questions teachers will be most likely to ask about this child. Develop a brief, accurate description of the student and the kind of assistance the student is likely to need.
  - Pictures of the student can help personalize the initial description.
  - Consider an early meeting between the teachers and the student's parents. Parents are often best at communicating the importance of inclusion for their child. And it's important to start building an alliance between family and teachers as soon as possible.
  - Consider an early opportunity for teachers to meet the student. Many teachers find a visit by the student to school or home visit better places to start than observation of the child with other labeled children in an isolated classroom.
  - Classroom observation by the integration consultant -- and perhaps the parents-- may improve preliminary planning

Preliminary Planning

- ❑ After the teacher has met the student. The principal and the integration facilitator meet with the teacher and ask, **"What will you need to take this student into your class?"**
  - Many teachers feel unprepared and ask for detailed assessment records or specialized programs. **Do not**

offer this kind of information. The best place to get to know the student is in the classroom. The best way to assess the student's special needs is to get to know the student in the classroom.

- Keep purpose in focus in every discussion. The purpose is for the new student to become a regular member of the class, treated like other members of the class with only those adaptations to curriculum and classroom routine necessary for participation. The purpose is not to make the classroom teacher into a special education expert. The purpose is not to turn classmates into junior therapists.

- Describe the process for involving the class in planning a welcome for the student.

- Tell the teacher about the MAPS process, which offers a systematic way to plan the student's curriculum after about a month for the teacher, the class, and the new student to get to know one another.

- Identify any obvious adaptations to classroom routine that will be necessary and discuss any problems they raise for the teacher.

- Schedule any training the teacher and the class will need to respond well to the student's special needs.

- Discuss the role of the student's assistant if the student needs one. Make it clear that the assistant's job is to fade direct help to encourage other students to get involved with the new student. Discuss contributions the assistant might be able to make to the whole class. From the beginning, avoid the idea that the assistant has responsibility for the student with special needs, while the teacher has responsibility for the rest of the class.

Enroll the teacher...

- Clarify the role of special education teachers or therapy specialists as supports to the teacher. The teacher maintains responsibility for the education of the whole class, including the student with special needs. The new student does not belong to specialists, the student belongs to the class.

- Discuss the role and availability of the integration facilitator. The integration facilitator acts as a resource to the teacher, the family, the principal, and the class. The integration facilitator offers to help with problem solving at the call of any of these groups. The teacher needs the integration consultant's home phone number.

- Find out what else the teacher needs to know and discuss any other needs the teacher identifies.

Immediate Adaptions

❑ Plan any adaptions or supports that will be necessary within the first month of the student's joining the class.

- Identify any training necessary to make the teacher and the class comfortable in assisting the student. For example, if the student has seizures, a public health nurse can orient the class on practical ways to assist. Training should be: specific to the particular student, oriented to practical everyday responses (not a mini-course in cerebral palsy, but a matter of fact description of how to help Maria out of her wheelchair), and conducted by an authoritative person. Consider involving the student or the student's parents as teachers of these lessons.

- Design and install needed physical adaptations; involve the maintenance person or the shop class.

- Arrange for an adult assistant if the student needs one. In hiring or assigning an assistant, consider their contribution to the class as a whole as well as their work with thenew student.

Think about

- An in-service presentation to the whole faculty on integration and the importance of inclusion can help develop a positive climate. So can presentations to school parent groups or to student bodies. Such presentations are especially powerful when presented by a team which includes teachers, parents, and students with direct experience of inclusive classrooms. It is most effective when people with direct experience are there in person, but video tapes or slide tapes also work well. Decide the timing of this first presentation with the principal. Will it have more impact before including a student with special needs or after that student has been in class for a while?

- Classroom teachers new to inclusion gain clarity, confidence, and practical information from the opportunity to observe an inclusive classroom and talk to the teacher and students.

- Some students with disabilities benefit from specialized instruction. This may involve one to one skill teaching or opportunities to learn in community environments outside the school. We advise delaying these special arrangements for the first month or so, while the teacher, the class, and the new student get to know each other.

- Anxiety about including a student with special needs can lead to unnecessary adaptations of classroom routine and curriculum. The best adaptations develop through solving problems day to day, as they arise in class, in the halls, and on the playing field. Once the teacher implements the minimal adaptations necessary to support simple presence with the class through the day, assess the need for further adaptation by watching the student's response over time. Expect it to take some time for people to grow accustomed to one another and don't rush to make big, permanent changes on the basis of early emergencies.

- Teachers worry about disadvantaging other students by including a student with special needs. Teachers worry about negative reactions from other students' parents. The principal, the integration facilitator, and the parents must keep clear that the goal of action for inclusion is a classroom that works for everyone, not just for the student with special needs. The teacher needs to know that the principal and the inclusion facilitator will offer continuing support and practical help to create a classroom in which conflicts between students' needs and mistakes can be identified and dealt with constructively.

- Keep a sense of the time things take. Overselling inclusion can undermine teacher confidence by creating the expectation of miracles. Wonderful things do happen when each student belongs, but they usually accumulate a little bit at a time, as life goes on. As with any student, changes usually become apparent when taking a moment out for reflection on the past month or semester or year. Changes are often more visible to an occasional observer like the principal or the integration facilitator than to those who are together everyday. Breakthroughs do happen, but breakthroughs are not the reason for inclusion. The reason for inclusion is simple. It is right for all children to share ordinary days as they learn and grow up together.

Involve the Class

Students offer one another class membership, acceptance, rejection, challenge, personal support, shared skills, vital information, rivalry, partnership, and friendship. In short, the experiences of growing up. Without their active involvement, a student with special needs cannot really be part of the class, even if the new student is physically present.

The nightmare about life with a disability excites fear that students will react to a student with special needs with rejection, exploitation, or cruelty. As long as any student remains "one of them", an outsider, such fears have a basis. When a student with special needs becomes "one of us", a member of the class, those who care can feel more secure.

As a member of the class, the new student may be disliked by some, rejected by some, teased by some, maybe even exploited by some. To think otherwise would require forgetting what it is like for anyone to grow up in school. If being part of the class depended on always being liked and supported by every other student, classrooms would be empty. But these negative experiences have a different meaning in the context of belonging to the class. Class members who make enemies also make friends. Class members who are rejected find others to console the pain. Class members who are teased find ways to come back. Class members who attract exploiters or attackers find defenders.

The quality of class membership for all students depends partly on the school administration and the classroom teacher. The principal's leadership makes the critical difference to physical safety for everyone in the building and to school standards that encourage learning, mutual respect, and constructive responses to conflicts and problems. The effective classroom teacher creates a well ordered environment that offers security for every student, supports student cooperation in living and learning with one another, treats individual differences with respect, and teaches positive responses to problems.

Good principals and good teachers know that they can only create a safe learning environment when students see themselves as responsible and resourceful. Schools that fail have administrators who can only see students as problems. Classrooms that fail have teachers who can only see children as a source of endless demands that distract from the delivery of prescribed lessons. Schools and classrooms that work recognize everyday problems as important occasions for learning and enlist students as the key resource in their solution.

School staff and parents must reconsider the typical underestimation of students' ability to solve problems and set goals and offer them a full measure of responsibility for welcoming the new student. Students create opportunities for one another to collaborate and grow. Students have an understanding of one another's gifts and needs that adults cannot match. Welcoming a student with special needs offers a class the opportunity to increase their level of cooperation, problem solving skill, and ability to support individual differences. Without the resources they bring, individually and as a group, inclusion is impossible.

Goal

This phase of action for inclusion aims to involve classmates in welcoming the student with special needs and getting to know the new member of the class.

Steps

❑ Set aside time a week or so before the student with special needs joins the class to plan a welcome. The new student may visit the class before this meeting, but the student with special needs does not participate in this meeting. If inclusion is new to the school, the principal's quiet participation in the meeting can send a message about its importance.

Orientation

❑ Orient the class to integration. Contrast integration and segregation, show the disadvantages of segregation, and identify the benefits of integration.

- Many students have ideas about what segregated schools or classes are like. Encourage discussion of their perceptions of segregated settings.
- Ask why students think the family, the principal, and the teachers want the student with special needs to join their class.
- Show how segregated settings reinforce stereotypes about the students who attend them. Discuss the negative consequences of stereotyping, especially isolation and strange expectations.
- Let the class know about the current controversy over segregated settings and show them their part in making an important social change.

Ground rules

❑ Clarify the ground rules for inclusion.

Putting our fears on the table

- Acknowledge adult fears. "We —the parents of the new student, the teachers, the principal, the integration facilitator— are scared about the student with

special needs joining your class. Why do you think we are scared?" Discussing this question gives class members the opportunity to define the boundaries of acceptable behavior toward the student with special needs and defines students as a resource to the adults.

- Define expectations. Take time to discuss each of these questions with the class. Keep written notes of the students' ideas

  - "What are some things that would hurt the class's welcoming the new student?"

  - "What can students do to include the new student and make the new student feel welcome?"

  - "What should the first day be like?"

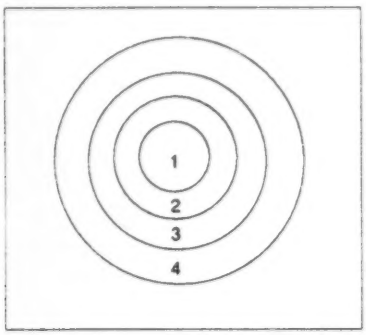
- Clarify the students' role: they are classmates and potential friends, not parents or teachers.

The Importance of Relationships

❑ Highlight the importance of good relationships and friendships in everyone's life.

- Ask students to identify important relationships in their

The circle exercise



lives by putting people's names in each of four concentric circles. Students may choose to keep their responses private.

  - "In the center circle, put the names of the people closest

to you; the people you love and count on most."

- "In the second circle, put people you really like and count on, but not quite as much as those you put in the first circle.

- "In the third circle, put groups of people you know and like to do things with, like Scouts, swimming, sports, clubs, and so on."

- "In the fourth circle, put people who get paid to be in your life, like your doctor, your dentist, other people like that."

- Ask for volunteers to name some of the people they put in each circle. Ask what they do with people in each circle. Ask what they count on people in each circle for.

- Show a contrasting set of circles for someone with very few relationships. "Here is a person named Sebastian who is your age. He has only his mom in circle one and the rest of his circles are empty except for circle four. His circle four is filled with doctors and therapists, and social workers. How would you feel if your life looked like this?"

- Underscore the importance of friends, people to do things with, and groups to identify with. Affirm the students' capacity to give these essential gifts to one another and to the student with special needs. Recognize that friendship grows with time and usually begins with shared activities. Not everyone will be friends with their new classmate, but everyone can be friendly.

Welcoming committee

❑ Organize a welcoming committee. Members of the committee agree to help the new student feel welcome in the class by offering...

... a greeting

... orientation to where things are in the school

... information about what the routine is and what activities are available

...invitations to take part in classroom, lunch time, and break time activities

...help with being safe in the classroom, in the school, and on the playground

Telephone committee

- ❑ Set up a telephone committee. Identify class members who will call the student with special needs to talk a bit about what happened today and what will happen tomorrow. Find a student for each night of the week. Don't neglect a telephone committee just because the new student may not speak.

- ❑ Students may have questions about the special needs of their new classmate, particularly if responding to these needs will change their daily routine somehow. Keep information practical and matter of fact, this is **not** the occasion for a mini-lecture on the neurology of autism or the genetics of down syndrome. Encourage students to pursue their questions with resource people who can help them such as the new student, parents, or special education staff.

- ❑ Let students know about the availability of resource people. If a physical therapist is coming to teach class members how to help their classmate with special needs out of a wheelchair, tell them when this will happen. If a special education teacher will be consulting with their teacher, let them know.

Think About

- Someone with direct experience of inclusive classrooms makes the best guide for this process. When a school introduces inclusion, the integration facilitator is often the best choice. As experience grows within a school, teachers will invite colleagues or choose to lead the process themselves.

Avoid Part-time Inclusion

You can't be a little bit integrated any more than you can be a little bit pregnant.

-Marsha Forest

- In the past some schools moved students with special needs into the regular classroom in stages. Students with special needs spent part time in a special education class; part time in their regular class. This is undesirable. It leaves the student with special needs in two worlds, mixes responsibility for the student's education between two teachers, and sends everyone a confusing message about where the student with special needs belongs. Avoid part time segregation unless it is the only compromise a principal or a teacher will accept.

Involving Older Students

- Some students with special needs benefit from planned involvement with older students. Older students can offer physical help, act as guides or models of positive relationship, assist in problem solving, and boost the status of the student with special needs in their classmates' eyes. If the need to systematically involve older students is apparent before the student with special needs joins the class, enlist older students and orient them too.

- Special educators have developed peer tutor programs, in which non-disabled students instruct students with special needs. Special education teachers train and supervise classmates or older students to carry out special instructional programs, often in special education rooms or in out of school instructional experiences. Don't confuse peer tutoring and welcoming a new student. The inclusive class plans ways to welcome and involve the new student. If necessary, they learn what they need to know to offer their classmate everyday assistance. They are not trained to deliver special education activities in their classroom.

- Not every student assigned to special class has obvious disabilities or requires major adaptations of classroom routine. For example, the student may simply require different teaching procedures in some subject areas. Weigh the benefits of planning a welcome for such students carefully against the possible costs of stigmatizing the student. Students with less obvious needs for assistance may be able to take their place in class with minimal preparation of the other students. If there is no organized approach to defining student responsibility for including the new student, watch carefully for signs of isolation.

The Circle of Friends

Judith Snow & David Hasbury

A circle of friends is a form of support that helps a student to become included. A child has many gifts to offer, but people often feel that they do not know how to interact with or discover the best in this child simply because of his or her differences. The circle creates a place of listening and welcome. It allows people to break down the barriers that prevent the child from participating as a full member of the class. The circle can became a place where people both grow in love and respect for the new student and also learn to challenge him or her to be a responsible and sensitive friend.

Sometimes support circles can be started without a facilitator, but there are many reasons why a circle of friends needs a support person to help it get off the ground and to protect it from coming apart. For one thing, people may not believe in the new relationships that are being established and put pressure on the members to deny the reality of their experience. For another children do not have access to the opportunities of the world to the same extent that adults do, and so they often need an adult to help them gather together all the resources that will help them find their way and meet their challenges

Because the facilitator has such a significant impact on the circle and therefore on the inclusive community the selection of the person to play this role is critical. The person should have the respect of most members of the school, be a good and creative listener and have the support of those in charge to allow the children to experiment with new ways and activities. This person must love and be loved by all sorts of children and have the energy to be a real part of their lives. Added to this must be the faith that the children can be responsible, communicative, and loving.

Sometime just before or after the new student arrives, the facilitator invites the class members to join the new circle. The first meeting begins with telling the story of the new student in a way that helps her to talk about her dreams. The children will respond with suggestions about how they can do things together and what problems they expect to encounter. The facilitator should encourage them to carry out these projects, and support their own problem solving. The facilitator needs to be in touch with the natural rhythm of the circle, helping it to meet as

more...

often as necessary to foster mutual support and relationships. At the same time meetings should not be overly formalized, and a simple get together at lunch time is often sufficient. Above all help the children to get a sense of when and how their meetings should be conducted.

As the circle continues to spend time and do things together they will have their own story to tell. The facilitator should support them to tell their story to each other and to other people on a regular basis. It is important to make sure that the new child's dream is always part of the story, so that each member of the circle, as well others in the community will see how the child's gifts and participation are growing. This will help the circle to keep its energy and its membership strong.

At times a very difficult problem will arise. The facilitator must help the children to talk over these difficulties and to come up with solutions In turn the facilitator must protect the children's right to try out their own ideas. This will cause their relationship to grow strong. It will also show the community that new and creative means of living and working together are possible.

When the time comes to build a new curriculum for the new student, the students of the circle have become the experts who can tell the teachers, parents, and principal a great deal about what will work and what their friend has to offer. and gain from participating in the life of the classroom.

Action Plans to Assure Membership in the Class
The MAPS Process

Every student becomes an active learner when offered the adaptations to curriculum and daily routine necessary to support participation in the learning opportunities available in the class and the school. Adaptations work best when planned by people who share the same places and activities as the new student does.

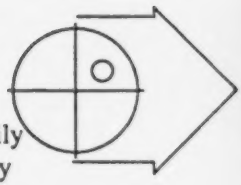
Each student becomes a resource when others care to discover the student's unique gifts and capacities and to develop opportunities for contribution.

Becoming an active learner and a contributor depends on how effectively the student, classmates, classroom teachers, family members, and administrators and resource people can work together to identify and solve the stream of problems that arise as time goes on. We call this continuing process **making action plans,** or MAPS for short.

When students, teachers, and family members have had a chance to get to know each other, it's important to gather the people who share responsibility for assuring class membership for the new student. The inaugural meeting improves understanding as members share what they have learned from their different experiences with the student with special needs, strengthens their identity as a problem solving group, and identifies what needs to be done next.

MAPS

Goal



This phase of action for inclusion brings students, family members, teachers, and administrators together to plan any adaptations to curriculum or daily routine necessary to assure that the student with special needs is an active learner in the class.

MAPS is a two part process. Part one creates a picture of who the new student is and the direction everyone wants to take to assist the student to be an active learner. This first part is completed by all the people involved in one meeting. Part two usually involves smaller groups planning specific ways to move in the overall direction set in part one.

Steps

- ❑ Schedule about an hour and a half for the MAPS meeting at a time when everyone involved can get together.
- ❑ Prepare
  - Decide who will facilitate the meeting and who will make the meeting record
  - Plan any extra help necessary to assist the student with special needs to be present and participate as much as possible
  - Explain the purpose of the meeting to the students who will participate. Make it clear that they have important ideas to share with the adults in the meeting because of what they know about their classmate
  - Get the room ready by putting up big sheets of paper for the record and arranging chairs in a semi-circle so people can see one another and the meeting record. Refreshments for a mid-meeting break are nice.

MAPS...

Introductions

- ❑ Begin by asking each person to say who they are, what relationship they have to the student with special needs, and what they hope for from the MAPS meeting.

History

- ❑ Ask the parents to share some of their family **history** by taking five minutes or so to identify some of the milestones in their life with the student with special needs.

Dream

- ❑ Ask the parents to speak about their **dream** for their child with special needs. This discussion points toward the future the MAPS group can help build for the new student.

  - It often works well to orient the group by asking other members of the group about some of their dreams for themselves before talking about dreams for the student with special needs. Including other students in the question gives a kind of horizon to dreams for the new student. Including the adults in the question strengthens the MAPS circle if the adults avoid trivial answers.

  - Include the student with special needs' own dream statement as much as possible. If a student has dificulty comunicating, notice and understand the student's response to the meeting. It often helps to assign someone who knows the student well to act as an interpreter.

  - Ask others in the MAPS group to speak about their dream for the new student. The better people have gotten to know the person, the more personalized and powerful these statements can be.

  - Some dream statements describe the person's life as an adult; some describe more immediate events. Both are helpful.

  - Don't push these statements. Don't judge or argue with people's dream statements. Record just what people say, in their own words and images.

MAPS...

Nightmares

❑ Ask the parents to speak about their **nightmare** for the student with special needs. Then ask other group members to share their nightmares for the student with special needs. This discussion defines the kind of future the MAPS group can help the person avoid.

Who is the student?

❑ Share the ways MAPS group members see the student with special needs. Record as many different words or short phrases as people want to offer.

- Ask, **Who is** (the student with special needs)?
- Ask, **What does** (the student with special needs) **like** and enjoy?
- Ask, **What are** (the student with special needs') **strengths, gifts, and talents?**

What does the student need?

❑ Identify what the student **needs** most now and during the rest of the school year. Specify the kinds of opportunities and supports that will assure the student with special needs actively learns as a member of the class. Don't forget social and extra-curricular activities.

- Be sure that statement about needs follow directly from the dream for the person. ask, **What does** (the new student) **need in order to move toward our dream?**
- Conclude this part of the discussion with a list of specific issues for action and the people who take responsibility for working on them.

Part II

Action plans

❑ Develop a **plan of action** for necessary adaptions to curriculum and classroom routine. Sub-groups of the MAPS circle usually take responsibility for developing, implementing, and revising these plans. The initial MAPS meeting identifies the plans necessary and gives the people responsible the opportunity to make commitments.

MAPS...

An Ideal Day

- Classmates and classroom teachers review the daily schedule one period or activity at a time and ask "Is this part of (the student with special needs') **ideal day**? Are there changes that would make this part of the day work better? Does the school offer a better opportunity for learning and contribution outside the classroom at any times during the day or week? If so, what would it take to make the most of those opportunities?

- Parents and teachers (and sometimes classmates) often find an issue that calls for them to plan and work together more closely.

- Teachers and resource people (and sometimes classmates) often need to plan detailed adaptations of curriculum or teaching procedures.

- Classmates and parents sometimes work together to enable after school activities.

An ongoing process

❑ Smaller groups meet, disband, and reform as necessary. The whole MAPS circle reconvenes to celebrate the passage from one year to the next, or when its important to define a new direction, or when the student with special needs faces a challenge that smaller groups can't handle alone. As one experienced MAPS facilitator puts it, "Bring people together when people lose track of where they are going, or when alliances among people are breaking down, or when people see the student with special needs as nothing but a problem". Any of the members can ask the rest of the group to gather.

Think About

The Facilitator

- Using a facilitator from outside the group involved daily with the student frees them to participate fully. An outside facilitator helps especially when people deal with significant conflict or a very complex situation.

- Participation in the process and observation, coaching, and debriefing with an experienced MAPS facilitator offer the best preparation for conducting the MAPS process. If facilitating a meeting without an experienced person present, invite a colleague to observe and discuss the meeting afterward.

The Recorder

- It usually helps to record what the MAPS group says with watercolor markers on big sheets of paper. The record focuses group attention and makes it easier to summarize the group's thinking. The recorder concentrates on getting people's words down accurately. Acting as a recorder can be a good way to prepare to be a MAPS facilitator.

Not an IEP

- Some sources of funds for extra assistance require an individualized education plan (IEP) for the students who need them. MAPS can guide the team that prepares an IEP by specifying the kind, amount, and schedule of help a student needs to be an active learner. But do not mix up MAPS with the IEP process. Keep the meetings separate.

Include students

- Be very cautious about excluding the student with special needs from the meeting. If a student has difficulty staying through the whole meeting consider partial participation.

- MAPS sessions have successfully included kindergarten and grade one students for at least part of the meeting. It's better to try including younger students than leaving them out.

And then...

action for inclusion begins the journey of integration. As the student with special needs finds a place in the class the time of welcoming a stranger passes into learning together. The excitement of doing something new subsides into the everyday flow of joys, sadnesses, and tensions. The sense of specialness that surrounded the new student eases into familiarity.

And difficulties continue.

Some problems arise from everyone's growing up and discovering an identity by trial and error in a confused society.

Some complications follow from human imperfection. Pettiness, distraction, greed, and anxiety have always dragged on cooperative efforts once things settle into daily routine.

Some difficulties come from sharing life with a person with a disability. Much in culture and in society and in ourselves conspires to cast the vulnerable person into a devalued social position.

- Policies and programs intended to provide people the assistance and equipment they need are hobbled by bureaucratic inertia and misguided social investments.

- Problems don't stay solved because people's desires, needs, and circumstances change. Because they lack the resources to be quietly bored, students with special needs often provide the earliest signals of erosion of the classroom relationships necessary for learning.

- People must come to terms again and again with the enduring vulnerability of the person with a disability. The hope that our new approach will take the handicap away dies hard but proves false often. It dies hardest when an approach to the person generates enthusiasm and obvious positive results, as classroom inclusion does.

Some problems become apparent as success in inclusion calls basic assumptions about schooling into question. The politics of basic change in the mission and methods of schooling strain the leadership skills of even the most capable teachers and administrators.

It is these continuing difficulties that make inclusion the right thing to do to educate all of the children. To grow up well in a turbulent world, all children need ...

...engagement in real, complex, human situations at a scale at which they can, with commitment and creativity, make a difference

...opportunities to encounter and revise their own prejudices and think critically about the social and cultural roots of their prejudice

...sustained experience of cooperation where the stakes for real people are clear and the consequences of their own imperfections and their own generosity become obvious

...adult models of skillful use of knowledge, authority, and money to enable people to achieve socially important purposes

...adult models of including matters of the heart in practical, everyday life

...adult models of fidelity in continuing to do the right thing when difficulties arise simply because it is the right thing to do

Integration means continually renewing and restoring wholeness in the face of disorder and division. In the opportunity to join parents, teachers, and administrators in creating and sustaining an integrated school lies the renewal of education.

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